2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

000 322 [283]

which all the material equipment of his life is secured. Huts, granaries, fences, beds, stools, drums, canoes—in fact, all the furniture of domestic and village existence—are made of wood. Bark forms the rope (*umwando*) used for nets and snares, or the rough strands (*lushishi*) with which poles are lashed together in building.

The skill and the speed with which the Bemba handle wood is amazing. A new-comer to the country is surprised to hear a fellow European arriving at his camp shout casually, 'Make me a table and a couple of chairs just there,' and to see the furniture grow out of the ground in the space of about half an hour. But this expertize, very widespread among the forest peoples of Africa, is ultimately dependent on the natives' knowledge of the properties of the different woods in their environment and on their perpetual watchful attention of the bush around them. Near their homes they must know where to find straight poles for uprights, pliable branches for roof frames, and hard wood for the handles of spears and other implements, and for five or ten miles round a village there are everywhere signs that an axe has been at work—a trunk newly barked for fibre, a raw stump showing where a tree has been felled, or a pile of new wood shavings marking where poles have been cut and trimmed before being carried back to the settlement. It is no wonder that the people seem to have a passionate interest in trees as such. Torday classifies many of these Central African peoples as 'forest-dwelling Bantu',[1] and it is an apt term.

824

All Bemba children of the age of 10, or even under, can point out the different species of trees quickly, even though they do not know their full uses until later. A European with no botanical inclinations finds it hard to distinguish between so many similar-looking trees, but the Bemba can name fifty or sixty species without hesitation. This interest is mostly utilitarian. The flowers which star the bush with such brilliant colours after the rains do not seem to attract the people, unless they can be used as medicines. Many flowers have no names. Most natives are merely irritated when a white man asks questions about the more striking flowers on the path. They answer, 'That is a flower [*ni maluba*]. Yes, and that is a flower also! They are all just flowers [*malubafye!*].' On the subject of trees, however, their faces light up and they are endlessly willing to talk.

This vivid interest in the forest is reflected in magic belief. It

[1] *African Races*, E. Torday, 1930.

widely reputed for their iron-working, when during the recent war tools became scarce. It is rarely found among the Bemba. Village smiths able to reforge and sharpen axe-blades and hoes are, however, common all over the area. The Unga obtained iron blades for their fish-spears from the Mukulu. 325

Wood-carving, highly developed among the Congo peoples, is limited among the Bemba to the simplest geometric designs, but Von Rosen noted some elaborate and rather striking carving among the Twa.(1) Weaving is unknown among the Bemba, and is not reported elsewhere. Baskets are generally made well but are not elaborate. For a fishing group the Unga have little variety in baskets and these again are simply made. A certain amount of leather-work is made by the Bemba. Both cooking and eating pots are made all over the plateau, but although they are well made they tend to be badly fired and hence to be fragile. 322 286 285 281 323

Salt-making flourishes particularly among the Shila and Tabwa, around Lake Mweru.(2) It is highly lucrative, compensates for the comparative infertility of the soil and provides a lively marketing activity. The salt is obtained by straining the soil through baskets and boiling the resultant brine. The salt-earth supply in the area is permanent and this tends to have a stabilizing effect upon villages, which would otherwise move frequently in accordance with the practice of shifting cultivation. The natural salt found in the pans at Mpika in Bemba country was also utilized and highly valued, being traded around the country to gratify the longing for salt in which the Bemba diet is singularly lacking. 317 E

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE

KINSHIP

(a) *Matrilineal Descent* is one of the cultural characteristics of this area. Amongst all these people affiliation is traced through the mother and a man belongs to his mother's clan. Succession is within a loosely organised matrilineage of narrow span whereby a man is succeeded by his younger brothers or by his sisters' sons, or by his sisters' daughters' sons. These rules govern succession to chieftainship, to a headmanship or to the name and status of a dead man by the practice known in this area as *ukupyanika*.(3) A woman usually succeeds to the name of her maternal grandmother and, in the case of a chieftainess, she succeeds to the title itself. Succession to a name is associated with the power to call on the ancestral spirits of the dead man or woman in question. 611

All the peoples described appear to be organized into matrilineal clans with totemic names. Among the Bemba, for instance, there are 40 or more such dispersed exogamous matrilineal clans. The clan claims descent from an original ancestress, a more or less legendary figure dating from the time of the first occupation of their present territory by the Bemba. Clan centres, in the sense of original villages of occupation, are remembered but 614

(1) Von Rosen, 1914. (2) Moore 1937.
(3) Richards, 9, 1950, describes this as 'positional succession'.